

March 24, 2020

Dear Families,

We are holding all of you in our hearts as we begin another a week with your children at home navigating social distancing from their classmates. Much of the communication you have received from us so far has focused on the practicalities of keeping in touch and providing as much continuity as possible for learning in these unprecedented circumstances. I would like to address some of the social and emotional needs that parents see their children facing and are facing themselves. If you've read anything about how to deal with children's anxiety at this time, the recommendation is for parents to remain calm. How to do that when many of us are unsettled ourselves!?

What you may be seeing:

First of all, know that it is likely that your children may exhibit new or intensified behaviors when they are uncertain, worried or when their routines have changed. These behaviors are signals for us, not indications that these behaviors are part of the child's character. We need tools to respond thoughtfully, not just react, scold, or try to fix it for them.

Infants and toddlers who are anxious may exhibit this by crying more, by withdrawing, by not being interested in foods or toys they have enjoyed in the past.

Children 3 to 6 may exhibit aggressive behaviors. Much of this will be exhibited in their imaginary play and dialogues. Listen to this play without judgment to give you an idea of what is on your child's mind. Act on what is worrying them.

Elementary children may be exhibiting super angry or super sad behavior when they are stressed. Biting their nails may be another indication—and, aren't we admonishing them constantly to keep their hands away from their faces?!

Adolescents experience emotions intensely. When under stress or uncertainty, they may have difficulty concentrating, hearing you or attending to what you are saying. Destructive behavior is common. This may exhibit itself in teasing or behavior that is mean spirited. Self-harm is possible.

Tools to help

First, there are ways to help ourselves keep calm. It is helpful to talk to others. Meditating can work. (The podcast list on the family resources page of our Distance Learning Handbook has wonderful meditative soundtracks that are good for adults as well as children.) Take a 15-minute break and slip outdoors for a while. And please use the other resources in the Distance Learning Handbook. There is a page for each age level that offers suggestions for parents, as well as general information about at-home Montessori, to help you as you navigate these uncharted waters.

The resource page in our Distance Learning Handbook also provides a number of links to helpful articles. The caveat here, of course, is that each link leads to others, which lead to still more things

to read. It is too easy to find yourself at the computer long after you should have gone to bed, overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information. Try to avoid that rabbit hole!

None of us invited the situation we are in, and everyone is stressed by the changes in our lives. The novelty has worn off, and now we are faced with the everyday reality of implementing systems that are new to us, for a longer time than we originally thought. The following post from a Montessori Foundation Facebook page is blunt, but helps with perspective:

Don't worry about them regressing in school. Every single kid is in this boat and they all will be OK. When we are back in the classroom, we will of course correct and meet them where they are. Teachers are experts at this! Don't pick fights with your kids because they don't want to do math. Don't scream at your kids for not following the schedule. Don't mandate two hours of learning time if they are resisting it.

If I can leave you with one thing, it's this: At the end of all of this, your kids' mental health will be more important than their academic skills. And how they felt during this time will stay with them long after the memory of what they did during those four or more weeks is long gone. So keep that in mind, every single day.

Please know that we understand you didn't sign up to be home-school teachers. The world will eventually return to some semblance of normal. In the meantime, we're here to help!

Sincerely,

Sue Fitzpatrick